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## Guest Editor's Note

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## ***Guest Editor's Note***

Spring 2020

### The Future of Civilization

There are a considerable number of problems that all of us human beings face in the modern world. These include climate change, conflicts originating due to religions and races, economic disparities, intolerant chauvinism, natural disasters, and so on. Each member of society should be responsible for addressing these predicaments.

It is the duty of politicians and bureaucrats to solve these problems by making and implementing policies. Scholars, likewise, share the task of confronting these problems with their academic activities. Yet, it is a tradition for academics to confine themselves to their respective disciplines.

The question arises here whether it is possible to attend to complex problems within a single field of study. Some scholars, doubting the conventional approach to social problems, have assembled to offer alternative methods, believing it to be essential to understand the progress of history and the context of society more broadly and comprehensively; this entails a multi-disciplinary approach.

The establishment of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations in 1961 is a distinctive example of this academic trend.

This intellectual movement has been supported by various scholars from many parts of the world. Japan is no exception, as leading scholars such as Prof. Shuntaro Ito and Prof. Tadao Umesao were fully aware of the necessity of utilizing an unconventional method to tackle the serious challenges that were predicted amid the process of economic growth in post-war Japan. Thus, in 1978, Professor Ito, Professor Umesao, and other prominent Japanese scholars decided to create a new association called the Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (JSCSC.)

They outlined three major objectives for the association:

- General and Multi-Disciplinary Assessment and Discussion
- The Construction and Then the Implementation of Theory from Global Perspectives
- Non-Exclusiveness

The Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of its establishment in 2013.

On that occasion, the association published a book entitled *The Future of Civilizations: Again, from a Comparative Civilizational Perspective*, which consisted of sixteen papers from various disciplines. I cannot summarize each chapter here in this note, as the space is limited; however, it is worth drawing attention to the preface as written by Prof. Shuntaro Ito, who was the first President of the Japan Society and who was also the President of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations from 1995 to 1998.

There are three important issues when discussing the future of civilizations, according to Prof. Ito. First, we should think of the alternation of the course of technological development. The dominance of modern science in the present world unfortunately has created a barrier between technical knowledge and humans, who are the subject of society. Prof. Ito points out that science, which originates in the Latin word *scientia* (to know), tends to disregard the profound discussions on how humans and nature are correlated. It is true that since the era of Enlightenment, the criterion for modern science has been a rather simple measure: Is it “true” or is it “false”?

Yet Prof. Ito insists that the idea of being “virtuous” or “vicious” should be given more significance when measuring civilizations in times to come. The nuclear threat after the break-down of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant during the great Earthquake and Tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, Prof. Ito believes, raises the alarm for us all.

Exploring the means of co-existence among civilizations as well as between humans and nature is another important element when discussing the future of civilizations, Prof. Ito believes.

Although upholders of the scientific revolution in the 17<sup>th</sup> century such as Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon have contributed to the “progress” of our society today, the supremacy of humans over nature has been excessively overvalued, and nature has been subject to exploitation by humans.

It is essential, Prof. Ito emphasises, that we should remember that all humans are a part of nature; thus, the civilization that humans create should consider the potential for a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.

Third, the achievement of “equitability,” which correlates with the issue of disparity among humans, is the last point Prof. Ito stated in the preface of the book. The contemporary world is marked by economic disparity as well as race and gender discrimination. Economic disparity is the most challenging obstacle to the development of civilizations.

Prof. Ito explains that the collapse of socialism in the late 1990s has brought about the misplaced conception that capitalism is the only valid system in our society.

As the result, a “money-game like capitalism” has prevailed globally, and an even greater concentration of capital in the hands of privileged people will create more social class divisions in the future.

Therefore, Prof. Ito believes, it is an urgent task for us to bring about the framework of post-capitalism as part of a new civilization. Prof. Ito concluded his note by emphasizing that the role of the Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations in advancing the comparative study of civilizations is central and vital to the betterment of our society.

These propositions presented by Professor Ito surely contain substantial implications regarding the future course of civilizations and are forms of encouragement for younger scholars, including myself.

When I was invited to join the publication project on Japanese civilization as an editor alongside Prof. Juri Abe (former Vice President of JSCSC) -- an idea that was proposed a few years ago by Prof. Andrew Targowski (former President of ISCSC) -- it was a time for both Professor Abe and myself to ponder the essence of Japanese civilization, even though the subjects of our respective life studies did not relate to Japan as such. Prof. Abe was an expert on Native Americans, and I dealt with Islam in Indonesia.

The outcome of the project was the book titled *Japanese Civilization in the 21st Century*. The book contains contributions from several Japanese colleagues who are members of the Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. We editors were satisfied with the content of the book, the authors having concentrated on various aspects of our Japanese civilization.

However, Professor Abe and I did, in fact, have some regrets, especially that we were unable to include one subject related to the importance of peace in the book. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution declares Japan's determination to abandon physical means to solve international conflicts and to renounce the right of belligerency. Although there are some arguments that the post-war Japanese Constitution was imposed by the United States of America, it is also a fact that Japanese citizens have supported the idea as well as the attitude of pacifism as stated in Article 9. Both Prof. Abe and I thought that, if civilization is supposed to guide humankind in its development, then surely the pacifist spirit of Article 9 is a part of Japanese civilization.

Prof. Abe and I strongly felt that it was crucial to spread the idea of pacifism upheld in the Japanese Constitution as one of the characteristics of modern Japanese civilization, especially when Japanese politicians, including current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, have little respect for the essence of Article 9 and have attempted to discard it. Their argument is twofold: The Constitution is no longer valid, as the times have changed, and the Constitution was the product of the American occupation of post-war Japan.

There is not enough space for discussing this in detail here; however, what I would like to emphasise is that the idea of Article 9 is the idea of civilization, which is the exact opposite of barbarism or uncivilized attitudes.

Throughout the history of mankind, fighting has never ceased, and numerous lives have been lost in wars and conflicts. There might be some, even some academics, who would say that these physical confrontations, which cause the death of so many people, are a valid mechanism for controlling the population. If we follow this line of reasoning, the sciences that have contributed to the development of the means of mass destruction through nuclear bombs, chemicals, and biological weapons can be justified. Prof. Abe and I have totally disagreed with this idea.

Even though at present we humans have been unable to eradicate wars and armed conflicts, this does not necessarily force the conclusion that the slaughter and extermination of fellow humans are everlasting phenomena. The role of scholars, according to Prof. Abe and myself, should be to explore the means of bringing about a more peaceful world.

What counts in the process of this academic exercise is to maintain simultaneously both the independence and autonomy of scholars and the cooperation of scholars from various fields of studies.

Thus, in addition to the three important elements that face future civilizations, as presented by Professor Ito, I would like to include the will and determination for achieving peace. This idea is relevant in the current international society, as greatly advanced civilizations now possess the capabilities to bring about large-scale destruction of this world by technologically sophisticated weapons. Because of this development, the future for all humankind, for its civilizations and for the natural world, is grim.

However, it is important to remember that another kind of civilization — one composed of those with decency, or the individuals who form part of the contemporary “civilization of virtue” — is able to deter the dangerous course being pursued by such greatly advanced civilizations, or the “civilization of the vicious.” I am convinced that both the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and the Japan Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, which consist of various scholars from different countries and disciplines, should collaborate in order to bring about a better future for civilization. It is, however, with a heavy heart that I continue this effort alone, without my friend Professor Abe, who passed away in March of last year.

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